United Nations A/HRC/WG.6/22/MDV/1

General Assembly

Distr.: General
17 April 2015

Original: English

Human Rights Council
Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review
Twenty-second session
4–15 May 2015

National report submitted in accordance with paragraph 5 of the annex to Human Rights Council resolution 16/21*

Maldives

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Executive summary

The Republic of Maldives has made remarkable progress on economic and human development, and moved with noted speed in advancing to a modern and developed society. The country has *engaged constructively* with the international human rights mechanisms, issuing a standing invitation to all UN Special Procedures Mechanisms in 2005, and hosting six visits to date. It has ratified seven of the nine core human rights treaties, five optional protocols, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, as well as the eight fundamental ILO Conventions dealing with four categories of fundamental principles and rights at work.

During the first review the Maldives received 126 recommendations, of which the Government fully accepted 89, partially accepted 11, took note of 6, and, with reasons, rejected 20. The Maldives is pleased to report that over the last four years, it has fully implemented a total of 58 recommendations, and partially implemented thirty-two.

On ***Education***, unlike most developing countries the Maldives offers free education up to higher secondary level, and free local and international exams to all children, adopting a policy of "No Child Left Behind". On ***Housing***, the Government has to date, built 2,630 social housing units, providing safe, habitable and affordable housing to 17,500 people. Promotion and protection of ***Health*** is a key priority, with universal health care. The Maldives has achieved MDG 4, 5 and 6, with infant and maternal mortality rates on par with developed countries. Polio has been eradicated and Maldives remained malaria free for more than 3 decades, and other vaccine-preventable diseases are non-existent in the Maldives. Several attempts have been made to strengthen the ***criminal justice*** system, and access to justice. Notably, a robust and revised Penal Code was passed in 2014, with several other key laws such as the Anti Torture Act, the Prison and Parole Act, the Anti-Money Laundering and Anti-Terrorism Financing Act and the Extradition, Mutual Legal Assistance on Criminal Matters and Transfer of Prisoners.

The Maldives has made significant gains in protecting the ***rights of vulnerable groups***. The Domestic Violence Prevention Act, the Sexual Offences Act and the Sexual Harassment and Abuse Prevention Act have strengthened the framework on protecting women, children and migrants from violence and sexual exploitation. The Disability Act was a strong boost in advancing the rights of persons with disabilities, allowing for financial assistance, regulations on minimum standards and identification, and affirmative action, while the Anti-Human Trafficking Act was hailed as a milestone in combating human trafficking.

Challenges remain. ***High dispersion*** of the very small population across a large area, the developmental and existential challenges posed by ***climate change***, the ***capacity and administrative*** challenges posed by being a SIDS, are persistent challenges. Emerging challenges such as ***religious issues*** posed by differing interpretations of religious teachings, the high prevalence of ***drug abuse***, and closely related issue of ***gang violence*** will bring up new issues in realising human rights in the country. Similarly, the process of ***democracy consolidation*** also challenges the Government, especially as the young and new institutions are subject to the harsh realities of democracy consolidation process of the 21st century.

The Government is determined to prevent reversals and avoid breakdown of the democratic system. It is resolute in retaining the authenticity of our democratic journey by staying true to the Constitution and the laws. It is committed to inculcating a culture of respect for human rights, to fully promote and protect human rights, adhering to international norms, while retaining its unique character. And in doing so, realising a truly ***Maldivian Democracy***.

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I. Introduction

1. This Report is submitted in accordance with United Nations Human Rights Council Resolution 16/21. The Report provides an account of the implementation of the accepted recommendations, and the developments of the human rights situation in the Maldives, following the initial review of the country, under the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) mechanism at the Ninth Session of the Working Group, in November 2010.

2. This year, the Maldives is celebrating the golden jubilee of independence. The country gained independence from Britain on 26 July 1965. Several years before that, the Maldives enacted a written Constitution and ensured universal adult suffrage in 1932. Since then, the protection of the rights of the individual has been a journey: a journey navigated by Maldivians, with the help of our international partners, trying to find local solutions to local problems. The country's developmental approach was one where guaranteeing the fundamental rights of individuals was a central component of national development planning.

3. Over the last five decades, the Maldives has made remarkable progress on economic and human development. In January 2011, the Maldives graduated from the United Nations List of Least Developed Countries – only the third to move out from the group since 1971.

4. Notwithstanding these achievements, the Government recognises the enormous challenges that the country face, and remains committed in advancing the rights and welfare of the people, with a particular focus on reducing inequality, empowering youth, and furthering socio-economic progress. The Maldives is highly prone to the unique posed by its small size, geographic dispersion, and climate change. These challenges remain significant hindrances in the country's progress towards full consolidation of democracy, a progress that is often punctuated by structural deficiencies, lack of capacity, and technical expertise.

5. The Government has always believed that continued engagement with the international community is the way forward. It is this belief that makes the Maldives an ardent supporter of the Human Rights Council since its inception, and subsequently an active member of the Council since 2010, the smallest country to be elected to the Council at that time. It is this belief that led the Maldives to ratify:

- seven out of the nine core human rights treaties;
- five optional protocols;
- the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court; and
- eight fundamental ILO Conventions dealing with four categories of fundamental principles and rights at work.

6. The initial review of the Maldives took place in 2010. It was a time when rapid and extensive democratic, human rights, and consequentially legal reforms, were being introduced. The second review is taking place at a time when the country's democratic growth trajectory is continuing in a steady upward momentum, while facing numerous challenges. Some democratic institutions of the State are just seven years old, requiring support to build resilience to withstand the inevitable pressures of 21st century democracy consolidation process.

7. The initial review set in motion a major drive nationally to strengthen the country's human rights framework. During the first review the Maldives received 126 recommendations, of which the Government fully accepted 89, partially accepted 11, took note of 6, and, with reasons, rejected 20. The Maldives, in September 2013, voluntarily

submitted a Mid-term Review Report, which highlighted the developments since the initial review. The Maldives is pleased to report that over the last four years, it has fully implemented a total of 58 recommendations, and partially implemented thirty-two.

8. The Government welcomes the second cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), which provides an opportunity to engage with the Human Rights Council, to take stock of the progress made in protecting and promoting human rights. The Review has given a new dynamism to the strong partnership between the Government and the relevant local and international stakeholders in promoting and protecting human rights in the country.

9. In recognition of the on-going challenges, the key priorities of the Government of Maldives currently are:

- Promoting and cultivating a culture of respect for human rights at all levels of society;
- Strengthening the legislative framework on human rights;
- Promoting the rule of law and democracy consolidation; and
- Enhancing the role of the youth and empowering youth in national building.

II. Methodology

Recommendation: 125, 126

10. The methodology of the Report follows the general guidelines adopted by the Human Rights Council for the second cycle of UPR.

11. Following the acceptance of a large number of recommendations, the Government, in consultation with the UPR Standing Committee, which includes representation from a wide range of Government agencies, the Human Rights Commission of the Maldives, and representation from the civil society, prepared an implementation matrix, where key agencies responsible for thematic areas were identified and followed up.

12. Preparation for the Maldives second national review was coordinated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in collaboration with the President's Office, the Attorney General's Office, and in consultation with the UPR Standing Committee.

III. Background and framework: Developments since the previous review

Recommendation: 25, 34, 35, 36, 37

13. In November 2013, Mr Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom was elected as the country's new President at the presidential elections, which was monitored by international organisations including the United Nations and the Commonwealth, all of whom endorsed the election and the electoral process as free and fair. According to the new executive set-up, the mandate to protect and promote human rights was assigned to the Attorney General, with a view to further strengthening alignment of international obligations with national legislature. On 1 July 2014, the Ministry of Law and Gender was established, to oversee all government functions related to families, children, women, persons with disabilities, and human rights. The Attorney General oversees the work and functions of the Ministry.

14. The Government recognises the need for strengthening the legislative framework for the promotion and protection of human rights. At the same time, the Government believes

that a normative change can take place only by fostering and cultivating a culture of respect for human rights, and promoting such values in the hearts and minds of people through awareness building, information sharing and other methods. The Government, therefore, is committed to building a society that respects human rights and one another, maintains tolerance towards opposing ideas, possess the ability to listen, and promote plurality of political thought. The onus, therefore, rests not only on the Government, but also on all national stakeholders and actors.

15. The current Constitution of the Maldives was enacted in 2008 and included an extensive bill of rights, and gave way to a multi-party democracy with full separation of powers. At the time of adoption, a total of 120 pieces of new legislation were identified as necessary to fully implement the Constitution. Since then, over 100 laws have been passed and ratified to ensuring the realisation of rights enshrined in the Constitution. Details of relevant and key laws are highlighted under the thematic areas below.

A. National human rights implementation and mechanisms

Recommendation: 31, 32, 33, 93

16. Because of the emphasis on mainstreaming human rights values into the society, all Government policy discussion papers submitted to the Cabinet, are now required to analyse the impact on human rights, to examine them through a human rights perspective.

17. The Human Rights Commission of the Maldives (HRCM) was first established by Presidential Decree in 2003, and later through the *Human Rights Commission Act* of 2005. The HRCM is currently an independent State institution created under the 2008 Constitution, that ensured that there be an independent, impartial, statutory entity, empowered to promote human rights and to investigate complaints of their breach. In order to strengthen the independence of the HRCM, the institution has been holding consultations with the Attorney General's Office to amend the HRCM Act to fully align with the Paris Principles relating to the status of national institutions. While the HRCM continues to face criticism regarding its role in the institutional framework, primarily due to lack of awareness about the mandate and activities of the Commission, the Government is committed to working constructively with the HRCM, even in cases where both parties may not agree.

B. Cooperation with international human rights mechanisms

18. The Maldives has continuously maintained a policy of engagement with the international human rights mechanisms including the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. The Maldives has been a vocal member of the Human Rights Council since 2010, seeking to enhance the capacity of SIDS to engage better at the Human Rights Council and implementing human rights obligations.

19. The Maldives in 2005, issued a standing invitation to all UN Special Procedures Mechanisms. To date, the Maldives has hosted six visits of mandate holders, namely:

- The Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, 2006;
- The Special Rapporteur on Independence of Judges and Lawyers, 2007 and 2013;
- The Special Rapporteur on the Right to adequate housing, 2009;
- The Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression, 2009; and
- The Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced people, 2011.

20. The Government is in consultation to finalise the dates for a visit by the Special Rapporteur on the Right of Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association, and has welcomed the proposed visit by the UN Working Group on discrimination against women in law and practice. The UN Sub-Committee on the Prevention of Torture also visited Maldives in 2007 with a follow-up visit conducted in December 2014.

21. It is important to note that as a small state with limited human resource capacities and expertise, there are a number of competing priorities at any given time. In these instances it proves to be logistically difficult to make arrangements for all requests. However, the Government has always tried to make alternative arrangements, and offer the best cooperation possible.

C. Scope of international obligations

Recommendation: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 20, 21, 60, 61, 121

22. The Maldives has ratified seven of the nine core human rights treaties, five optional protocols, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court as well as the eight fundamental ILO Conventions dealing with four categories of fundamental principles and rights at work.

23. The Government is reviewing the ICRMW, and expects ratification of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Girls, in the near future. It has withdrawn its reservations to Article 7(a) on CEDAW in 2010. The Government has also reviewed the formulation of the current reservations to Article 16 of CEDAW in January 2013 and decided to submit a re-formulation to the Parliament.

24. Due to the high number of ratifications, and the currently complex and rigorous demands of the international treaty reporting process, there is a heavy reporting burden on the Government. In this regard, the Government has submitted the 4th and 5th combined Periodic report under the CRC in February 2013, the 4th and 5th combined periodic report under the CEDAW in December 2012, and is in the process of finalising the initial reports under CAT and CRPD.

IV. Follow-up to the previous review, achievements and challenges

A. Economic, social and cultural rights

1. Education

Recommendation: 33, 44, 65, 86,110,111,112,113

25. The Maldives has an illustrious history of providing free education for all children without discrimination on the basis of gender, class, etc. Unlike most developing countries, the Maldives offers free education, up to higher secondary level: the constitutionally obliged level of education as a matter of right for all therein.[1] All children below the age of 16 are given free textbooks, exercise books, and stationary, regardless of their socio-

[1] The Constitution everyone has the right to education without discrimination of any kind. Primary and secondary education shall be freely provided by the State. It is imperative on parents and the State to provide children with primary and secondary education (Article 36 (a) and (b)).

economic background, and all local and international exams are administered free for all students.

26. In order to further enhance and develop the education system, and to continue applying programmes and measures to guarantee the enjoyment of the right to education, the *Education Bill* was drafted and submitted to Parliament in August 2014 and the Government is currently in the process of formulating the *Higher Education Bill* as well, intending to submit it to Parliament later this year.

27. There is continuous emphasis on improving the quality of education being provided, and in that regard, training and capacity building of education providers is a continuing effort. A Professional Standards for Teachers and Principals is being applied in schools to monitor and improve the quality of teachers and administrators. Standards for monitoring of pre-schools under the *Pre-School Act* are underway. The Government works with international partners, such as UNICEF, in developing capacity on Special Needs Education, development of standards for "child-friendly" schools that are safe for children and provide an environment that caters effectively for the child's learning, and monitoring and research of the existing school system.

28. The Government implements a policy of "No Child Left Behind", to ensure that every child's productive capacity is fully realised and the different needs of students and schools across the country are catered for, and important initiatives, such as the Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) initiative, which is an apprenticeship programme to introduce students to the workplace, have been introduced.

29. Providing equal access to all children has been a continuous challenge due to the geographical nature of the country. For islands with extremely small populations, additional measures are taken to ensure that children have access: some islands are connected by ferry service so that students can attend schools in nearby islands, or they are provided monthly allowances for boarding purposes.

30. Importantly, training and capacity building is carried out to improve access for children with special education needs. The Government has catered for classes for the hearing and speech impaired, since 1985. A Braille Centre has been established with all required equipment and the Centre has begun classes in 2013. Moreover, five specialised early intervention centres have been established across the country and eighty specialised Special Education Needs (SEN) units have been planned in mainstream schools within the next five years. These initiatives further the case of "No Child Left Behind", with special attention given to building productive, respectful, and responsible future citizens, regardless of socio-economic class, physical ability, or gender.

31. With the aim of instilling tolerance and respect for human rights values, the current curriculum that is implemented in all public schools has incorporated civic education, life skills and human rights. The HRCM also conducts activities on human rights education promotion in schools, such as Human Rights clubs, essay and quiz competitions, and theatre festivals. Additionally, in partnership with local NGOs, the Ministry of Education also promotes Sustainable Environmental Practises among students, such as making schools "plastic bag" free and setting up environmental clubs.

2. Housing

Recommendation: 109, 124

32. All successive Governments have declared housing as a key part of their agenda with the recognition of access to safe, habitable, and affordable housing as a human right under the Constitution of 2008. Since then housing has been a key pledge in the election manifestos of all major political parties. As a result, every effort is made to ensure that

dwellings are secure, affordable, habitable, and accessible, and that basic amenities and services are readily accessible.

33. Traditionally, plots of land are given – free of charge – to individuals to construct residential homes, which, over the years, have become valued inheritance. As a result, the size of the inherited land grew smaller. The impediment to the realisation of the right to adequate housing due to overcrowding and land scarcity in Male' and some other islands, was recognised by the UN Special Rapporteur on adequate housing in 2009.

34. The country has made highly commendable progress in its efforts to provide affordable and safe housing for all despite having to cope with remoteness of the islands, increasing demand for scarce land (see paras. 99–101), the inherent challenges associated with being a SIDS, and the threats associated with climate change (see paras. 117–120).

35. Since 1990, the Maldives has embraced public housing schemes and numerous other projects to counter these prevailing challenges. Since 2005, the Government has constructed a total of 2,630 housing units at affordable rates, and a total of 17,500 people have benefitted from the scheme. Currently, a total of 3,855 housing units are being constructed that would benefit more than 25,000 people. Social housing units are sold through long term financing schemes applying government-subsidised rates to eligible beneficiaries, which are below market price.

36. All social housing projects undertaken by the Government allocates a percentage to persons with disabilities, and ground floor apartments for elderly people and persons with disabilities for easier access. Under the *Disability Act* it is a mandatory requirement to ensure accessibility to public buildings by all, and by extension government social housing projects. Compliance documents, which will be given effect through the proposed draft *Bill on Building Design*, will ensure certain minimum requirements are met in ensuring accessibility to all buildings.

37. In terms of access to safe and secure housing, island erosion is an on-going challenge. Land reclamation projects are carried out, with the purpose of addressing land scarcity issues on densely populated islands. Islands that are reclaimed are at-least 1.4m above mean sea level and provide shore protection to areas vulnerable to erosion due to adverse or dynamic weather conditions.

38. Physical infrastructure in the Maldives suffered extensive damages during the Indian Ocean Tsunami of 2004. The total damage was estimated at around $470 million, which amounted to 62% of GDP. About a quarter of the nearly 200 inhabited islands in the country were severely damaged, and 10 percent were made uninhabitable. More than 80 people died, and 26 are missing and/or presumed dead. During the post-tsunami reconstruction programme, the Government constructed and repaired housing for over 12,000 internally displaced persons. In addition, more than 20 islands harbours destroyed by the tsunami were reconstructed, and water and sewerage facilities destroyed during the tsunami were reconstructed in over 25 islands.

39. Human induced climate change has increased the intensity and frequency of natural disasters with around 70 percent of disasters now deemed to be climate related, up from 50 percent two decades ago (see paras. 117–118). The country's constant vulnerability to climate change, and its adverse impacts, is a hindrance to the full enjoyment of human rights, including the right to adequate housing, and risk the development gains it has achieved over the past decades.

40. With the lessons of the tsunami in mind, the National Disaster Management Centre is currently undertaking consultations on the *Disaster Reduction and Prevention Bill*, which will put into place measures to address disaster risk reduction, mitigation of damage, post-

disaster recovery and reconstruction. The Government intends to introduce the Bill to Parliament within the course of the year.

3. Health

Recommendation: 30, 112

41. Promotion and protection of the health and well being of the people is a priority and a constitutional obligation on the State. The Maldives has already achieved the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) 4 and 5. The Maldives has also achieved infant mortality rates at par with the developed countries at 9 per 1000 live births. Maternal mortality rates stand at 13 per 100,000 live births, a significant achievement, well below the global average of 210, and South East Asian average of 190. The Maldives has also achieved MDG 6. Malaria has been successfully controlled. There is low prevalence of HIV/AIDS (19 reported cases between 1991 and 2013 and 7 currently living with HIV/AIDS according to published data), although associated risk factors such as injecting drug users, and sex workers are increasing. The South Asian region was certified polio-free by the WHO in March 2014, a status the Maldives has achieved several years ago. Other vaccine-preventable diseases, such as neonatal tetanus, whooping cough, and diphtheria, are non-existent in the Maldives.

42. In 2012, the Social *Health Insurance Act* introduced universal health care to all Maldivians. This has enabled guaranteed access to health care for people of all socio-economic backgrounds. The current Government has further extended the insurance scheme to include kidney and liver transplants which were previously unavailable.

43. The Government is committed to ensuring that access to medical services is ensured, through the availability of General Practitioner Services throughout Maldives. In this regard, work is underway to develop an electronic GP registration and Patient Record Archiving System, which would facilitate in-patient identification, birth and death registration, as well as substantiate access to healthcare and universal health coverage. Birth registration has been made possible, for everyone across the country since 1960s.

44. The *Public Health Protection Act* of 2012 conferred legal authority on the Director General of Public Health and the Health Protection Agency to take necessary action when there are threats to the health and well being of the population, and to administer vital health promotion and protection services such as immunisations, food safety measures, quarantine, waste disposal, and vector control. Further legislations such as *Health Service Bill*, and *Health Professionals' Bill*, would ensure that the legislation on health services is strengthened and the right to health is ensured. The Health Master Plan (2016–2025), and the *Mental Health Policy*, which are being finalised, would further strengthen the protection of this right.

45. Key infrastructure developments have taken place to ensure timely access to medical services. The tertiary hospital in the capital Malé is being expanded to include a dedicated wing for reproductive health services. A total of 71 pharmacies have been established across the country, and progress has been made to establish sea ambulance services and paramedic services across the country. The Government has also recruited over 300 doctors since November 2013 to facilitate access to professional and competent health care professionals across the country.

46. Part of realising the right to health is ensuring a safe and healthy environment. On the legislative front, the *Tobacco Control Act* of 2010 and the *Public Health Protection Act* of 2012 contribute to this effort. The *Tobacco Control Act* provides for reducing exposure to non-smokers, and harm from passive smoking, as well as protecting children from taking

up the habit, through banning tobacco advertisement and sponsorship, as well as introducing strict penalties for using minors to buy or sell tobacco.

47. Thalassaemia remains one of the most prevalent disorders in the Maldives, with over 18% of population living with the disease, also making it the country with the highest rate of prevalence in the world. The *Thalassaemia Control Act* of 2012 aims to control the spread of thalassaemia, and ensure that patients are given the necessary treatment to lead a normal and productive life. Current temporary measures taken, include: checking the thalassaemia status and provision of counselling services before marriage. Genetic counselling services are also provided and in cases where abnormalities in the foetus are identified, options for medical termination are also explained. The Government to date has offered Bone Marrow Transplant services to 34 patients of thalassaemia and other Hemoglobinopathies, under the Health Insurance Scheme.

48. The Maldives works very closely with international partners in developing the health sector at the service level. It works with UNOPS and WHO is ensuring the effective use of limited resources in the sector through the establishment of the Public Health Procurement and Supply Chain. Pentavalent vaccine was introduced in 2013, to complement the existing vaccination effort of the Government.

49. In collaboration with UNICEF, the Government has also worked on developing the Integrated National Nutrition Plan, and Guidelines regulating school canteens. Awareness programs on nutrition implications of energy drinks have been conducted throughout 2014. Additionally, the Ministry of Health conducted a baseline study identifying the prevalence of sexual exploitation of children in the Maldives, with a view to better understand and address public policies. Guidelines on Preventing Mother to Child Transmission of HIV were developed, and training of health care professionals on care for children with HIV was carried out in 2013.

B. Civil and political rights

1. Criminal justice

Recommendation: 26, 59, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 119, 123

50. The Maldivian Judiciary is an independent branch of the State since 2008. In that regard, as other State institutions, the Judiciary is also becoming accustomed to its new role in the governance of the country.

51. In 2010, it was recommended that the Maldives implement the United Nations Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers into domestic law. A *Legal Profession Bill*, in this regard, is currently being drafted with assistance from UNDP. The draft Bill would set up an independent Bar Council aimed at empowering as well as regulating the legal profession, and the conduct of lawyers. The *Judges Act* of 2010 already contains some of the UN Principles and further work is being done to identify gaps in the Act and to fully align it with the UN Principles.

52. Several related laws have also been passed in relation to strengthening the criminal justice system and access to justice. In January 2015, the Civil Court established five separate divisions with the aim of providing its services with speed and efficiency. On the legislative front, the *Anti Torture Act* of 2013, *The Prison and Parole Act* amendments of 2015, *The Anti-Money Laundering and Anti-Terrorism Financing Act* of 2014, and the *Extradition, Mutual Legal Assistance on Criminal Matters and Transfer of Prisoners* of 2014, are some of the key laws that have contributed to this effort. These laws supplement efforts by the Government to modernise the criminal justice in line with the country's international obligations, and norms.

53. The Maldives continues to engage with the international human rights mechanisms aimed at strengthening the judiciary. In 2007, it had a visit by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers Mr Leandro Despouy. The recommendations of the Special Rapporteur were largely implemented. In 2013, his successor Ms Gabriela Knaul, undertook a follow-up mission. Her report identified a new range of issues to further strengthen the judicial sector. At a structural level, the UNDP is working with the judiciary in developing a continuous education curriculum for judges in order to establish a Judicial Training Centre, which encompasses training on human rights obligation. The Government is working with international partners towards strengthening the judiciary and public confidence of it.

2. The Penal Code

Recommendation: 26, 55

54. The Penal Code that was first enacted in 1964, has been replaced with a more modern Penal Code that passed by the Parliament and ratified on 13 April 2014, and will come into force in July 2015, which is expected to contribute towards strengthening the entire criminal justice sector into a modern and advanced system.

55. During this grace period, the Government with the support of UNDP, is undertaking a comprehensive roll-out programme that included preparation of all necessary guidelines and practice modules complement to it, review and revision of existing laws, as well as awareness and training programmes targeted for law enforcement officials and the judiciary to ensure better implementation of the Code.

56. Recently an amendment to the *Judicature Act* reduced the number of judges on the Supreme Court bench from seven to five, and required to establish two branches of the High Court of Maldives with the aim to provide easy access to the appeal mechanism, one in the northern region and the other in the southern region of the country within 90 days of the amendment's enactment. The amendment required the Judicial Service Commission (JSC) to submit to the Majlis, recommendation on judges to be removed. The Parliament voted in favour of the JSC recommendations submitted, and the bench was reduced in accordance with the newly amended legislation.

57. The Government believes that the Judiciary, as an independent branch of the State, should be free from interference and undue influence by the Executive, as per the Maldives Constitution, internationally accepted good governance practises, and democratic principles. As all State institutions of the Maldives, the concept of an independent Judiciary is still new. In this regard, the Government believes that the Judiciary, with other institutions, must be given the time and space to grow organically into a robust democratic institution.

3. Shariah

Recommendation: 55, 59

58. As per the Constitution of the Maldives, which was finalised by a representative, democratically elected Parliament, Islam constitutes the basis of all laws made in the Maldives; hence it is unconstitutional to remove Hadd punishments such as the death penalty and flogging from the Penal Code. However, more importantly, there is extremely high evidentiary burden prescribed to Hadd offences.[2]

[2] For example, even if a judge passes a death sentence, the heirs could forgive the convict or request for

59. The Maldives, since 1952, maintained one of the world's longest standing de-facto moratoriums on death penalty. In light of increased violent crimes and murders, and following extensive public consultations and debates, the Government in 2014, adopted the *Regulation on Investigation and the Execution of Sentence for Wilful Murder* aimed at regulating the process of implementing the death penalty. It is important to note that the Regulation does not allow for the implementation of the death penalty judgement unless and until the full appeal mechanism has been exhausted. The Regulations came into force on 27 April 2014.

4. Religion

Recommendation: 91, 100

60. The Maldives has remained a Muslim country for the last 800 years, and the social framework, historic and traditional values have evolved over the decades, to be intricately tied to Islamic practises. Given this context, the Constitution of the Maldives not only stipulates Islam as the State religion, but also requires that every Maldivian should be a Muslim.

61. Non-Muslim foreigners are allowed to practise their religion in private.

5. Right to information

62. President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom ratified the *Right to Information Act* in 2014, which was hailed as a major step towards good governance and transparency in the country. As per the stipulations of the Act, an Information Commissioner has been appointed, and an Information Officer has been appointed at every government office, including State funded institutions such as the Parliament, the judiciary, and independent bodies, to facilitate access to information. The Act also provides for the protection of whistle-blowers.

C. Rights of vulnerable groups

Recommendation: 116, 117, 118

1. Women

Recommendation: 22 ,23 , 24 , 27, 28 , 29, 31, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72 ,73, 74 , 75, 103, 104, 105, 106, 120

63. Gender empowerment is an area with both significant successes and continuous challenges for the Government. Promotion and protection of women's rights is a key priority for the Government of President Yameen. The Government's priorities for the empowerment of women include eliminating barriers to employment and participation in the political sphere, enhancing economic empowerment, adopting a zero tolerance for violence against women and harassment through legal and normative measures, ensuring the protection of families from experiencing negative consequences from divorce, and equal distribution of matrimonial property after divorce. To effectuate this, an amendment to the *Family Act* has already been submitted to the first sitting of the Parliament this year.

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blood money instead. Islam encourages heirs to forgive, instead of opting for retaliation in murder cases.

64. Over the years, the Maldives has achieved significant progress, especially in terms of legislative framework, in order to implement the rights and obligations towards the empowerment of women, enshrined in the Constitution, as well as CEDAW and other related international human rights instruments.

65. Firstly, the *Domestic Violence Prevention Act* of 2012, marked the first of many laws tailored towards the prevention of violence against women. The Act criminalises all forms of domestic violence and provides protection, justice, and support for victims. Secondly, the *Sexual Offences Act* of 2014 explicitly defines and criminalises acts of sexual abuse such as rape, sexual violence, and sexual abuse. It also criminalised prostitution as an identifiable offence for the first time, alongside its incitement and all other actions that can be taken as either aiding or abetting. The *Sexual Offences Act* also identifies four circumstances of unacceptable sexual relations between spouses, allowing for the first time the identification of marital rape in Maldivian legislature. Thirdly, the *Sexual Harassment and Abuse Prevention Act* of 2014 criminalises harassment and sexual abuse, and sets out an accountability mechanism for such actions, which take place at the workplace or other public service institutions. The revised *Penal Code* also sets out corresponding sentences in a transparent and equitable manner without any discrimination between men and women, narrowing down the scope of judicial discretion and arbitrary sentencing in criminal justice.

66. The Maldives is looking holistically at the empowerment of women, through the enactment of a *Gender Equality Bill*, which the Government hopes to introduce to the Parliament within the course of the year. This Act will bring the relevant legislation on non-discrimination and gender equality in line with Maldives' obligations under international human rights instruments, operationalize the constitutional provision against discrimination based on gender, and promote the use of temporary special measures.

67. In an effort to increase the representation of women in decision-making, the Government will re-introduce the provision for temporary special measures, which was excluded previously, in the *Political Parties Act* of 2013, through the process of revising election-related legislature that is currently underway to streamline and consolidate existing legislature.

68. Similarly, the Ministry of Law and Gender is in the process of preparing a Gender Advocacy Strategy, Gender Policy, and promoting Gender Responsive Budgeting. Following extensive consultations, the Government has also decided to remove the reservations to Article 16 (a), (b), (e), (g), (h) and Article 2 of CEDAW.

69. Other developments include the establishment of a Family Protection Authority and the setting-up of five safe homes in five islands, where female victims of gender-based violence are provided temporary shelter. In addition to the shelters, standard operating procedures and guidelines are also being developed under the Act that enhances protection offered to victims of domestic violence and empower women in that regard.

70. Efforts are also underway to safeguard and promote the sexual and reproductive health of women. The National Family Planning Program, which successfully reduced the large family sizes and high maternal and infant mortality rates that prevailed in the country, is designed so that family planning and counselling services, and contraceptives are available in all islands, upon request. Programs are also being conducted to provide information on reproductive and maternal health including family planning to unmarried youth, and standards have been developed to provide adolescent friendly health services.

71. Although there is no reliable data available on unsafe, and clandestine abortions in Maldives, lawful medical termination of pregnancy for thalassaemia major, sickle cell major, multiple congenital anomalies and maternal life threatening conditions have been accorded since November 1999. The *Fiqh* Academy extended this leeway to include medical termination of pregnancy within 120 days of conception, for pregnancies resulting

from rape by an immediate family member, and rape of a child who is physically and mentally unfit to continue the pregnancy and delivery, in December 2013. Age-appropriate education on sexual and reproductive health is integrated in various subjects of the current curriculum and is taught through life skills programs.

72. The Maldives has a proud history of female participation in the national labour force. There are no cultural prejudices against working women, with women adequately represented in non-stereotypical sectors, such as finance, across the country. Equal pay is guaranteed as remuneration is set against the position, as opposed to the person filling the job. Further, initiatives such as the amendments proposed to the Civil Service Regulations in 2014, now allow for a total of 60 working days as paid maternity leave: an extension of maternity leave that has always been unquestionably granted. Some institutions, such as the Maldives Monetary Authority (the central bank) recently announced a six-month paid maternity leave. Similarly, policies for setting flexible working hours for pregnant women, and women with children under the age of three, to work from home, have also been introduced.

73. One of the biggest challenges to women in the labour force is the lack of childcare arrangements. The Ministry of Law and Gender has introduced guidelines for day-care centres in order to standardise those facilities.

74. In order to strengthen the livelihood initiative for home based workers in the Maldives, of which most are women, a project, named SABAH, is being implemented at country level in the Maldives. The project is coordinated by the Ministry of Economic Development with a shareholding of 40% by Maldivian Home Based workers and 60% by the Government. SABAH Maldives collaborates with local cooperatives to support and showcase the products of Home Based Workers in the market. Through implementation of this project it has also provided capacity building and trainings in areas such as food processing, handicrafts training to management trainings to soft skills. To date, membership for this project has reached to 914 members throughout the Maldives and 73 members have been trained from abroad.

75. Additionally, the Government has also announced its intention to ensure that women are represented on the Boards of public companies. Currently, 13 out of 59 Board Members of companies with government shares are women.

76. Women's empowerment is a dynamic issue, and requires continuous attention. Though positive changes have taken place, there are prevailing impediments that hinder growth in this sector. For example, a Baseline Study conducted by HRCM revealed changing mind-sets with regards to the rights and roles of women in society, as well as violence against women.

77. In order to counter these changing attitudes, the Ministry of Law and Gender, together with the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, is working on educating the public on rightful religious teachings, alleviating their misconceptions about women's rights and responsibilities. The Ministry of Law and Gender is also in the process of launching a media awareness programme to profile non-stereotypical women leaders who have made an impact in Maldivian society. The aim is to provide role models and raise the profile of women, and their contributions to society. Gender sensitising workshops have been conducted in five atolls, which included 410 participants.

78. Several safeguards have been enacted to address polygamy including the requirement to provide proof of financial means and consent of the spouse, and to counter the negative impacts of divorce, which primarily affect women. A nation-wide awareness program has been initiated by the Ministry of Law and Gender to disseminate information about the legal avenues available for women to seek protection and matrimonial property

and child support. Awareness programs are also being conducted on raising awareness on prenuptial agreements to ensure protection of property and families in the event of divorce.

2. Children

Recommendation: 22, 27, 28, 48, 70, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 85, 86

79. The Maldives has taken significant steps to strengthen child rights and the national child protection system. Following a mapping exercise to identify gaps in the legal framework governing child rights, a new *Child Rights Bill* has been drafted to improve and modernise the current *Child Rights Act* of 1991 This new Act is designed to bring the child protection system in line with the Maldives' obligations under the CRC.

80. Several new laws have further reinforced the protection mechanism against abuse of children. These include the *Domestic Violence Prevention Act,* and the *Anti-Human Trafficking Act*. Further, the *Juvenile Justice Bill* intended to be submitted to the Parliament this year would establish a juvenile justice and welfare system. Additionally, the Ministry of Law and Gender is currently conducting a consolidation exercise, reviewing all child rights and protection related legislations and regulations, with a view to modernising, harmonising as well as facilitating better enforcement.

81. Challenges remain in ensuring the rights of the child, as highlighted through the high profile flogging case against a minor in 2013. The flogging case was appealed by the accused with assistance from the State, and the High Court overturned the verdict of the Juvenile Court, setting precedence for matters related to criminal offences and sexual abuse of children. The child is now being rehabilitated into society, provided education, under State care, as all other children in conflict with the law.

82. Initiatives were also undertaken to create awareness around child abuse and its prevention. Several capacity building programmes were conducted by the Juvenile Justice Unit (JJU) of the Ministry of Home Affairs in collaboration with UNICEF, to train law enforcement officials, judges, magistrates and social workers on justice for children, and media personnel on the CRC and ethical reporting of children in the media. A code of ethics and reporting guideline was also developed for the media.

83. Additionally, the Maldives Child Protection Database was updated and expanded to two more atolls. Assessments were conducted, in collaboration with HRCM, to collect data on child participation and representation across various sectors, and guidelines were developed to facilitate the participation of children in matters affecting them. Standard operating procedures in interagency case referrals were revised to enhance coordination among the concerned agencies.

84. Initiatives to protect and promote the rights of children include capacity building, in responding to, and investigating cases of, child abuse and gender based violence. The Maldives also participated in the regional initiative named South Asian Initiative to End Violence Against Children (SAIEVAC), which established partnerships between civil society, government and regional bodies.

85. Children are ensured access to education, without restrictions on entry and re-entry under the age of eighteen. The Maldives has enacted safeguards against child marriages, especially of the girl-child, including a strict floor of 18 years for marriage, and explicit parental consent and counselling in other circumstances. According to the Family Court and the Registrar of Marriages, 23 minors contracted legal marriages in 2012, followed by 14 minors in 2013 and 16 minors in 2014. However the Family Court confirms that all such minors had been seventeen years of age, and were calculated to be eighteen following the Muslim (lunar) calendar. Efforts are also being made to collect data on unregistered marriages including child-unregistered marriages in the Maldives.

3. Persons with disabilities

Recommendation: 30, 49, 124

86. There has been considerable work done in ensuring the rights of persons with disabilities. The biggest achievement in terms of legislation was the introduction of the *Disability Act* in 2010. Complementary regulations under the Act have been implemented, including the Regulations on Disability Minimum Standards, Regulation on Providing Financial Assistance and Assistive Devices to Persons with Disabilities, and the Regulation on disability registry. Disability classification guidelines are also being drafted in order to define different disabilities, to create a rights-based mechanism in providing government incentives, rehabilitation opportunities and serve as basis for affirmative action. Additionally, the Mental Health Policy is also being revised and plans are underway to develop a mental health action plan.

87. The National Policy on Disability was endorsed, and implementation started on 31 October 2013. The Disability Council was constituted and it held awareness workshops throughout various islands and through media campaigns, on the nature of disabilities and the rights accorded to them. The Council also collaborated with the Ministry of Economic Development to hold a National Exhibition to display crafts prepared by persons with disabilities. An allowance is also being maintained for persons with disabilities, by the National Social Protection Agency.

88. The Government has also introduced a National Disability Award in 2013, to recognise those that contribute to the wellbeing of persons with disabilities.

89. The Government recognises that this is an area that requires further strengthening. In that regard welcomed the HRCM's launch of a National Inquiry on Access to Education for Children with Disabilities, the findings of which are being compiled currently.

90. Stereotyping and lack of employment for persons with disabilities are prevailing challenges that the Government is working hard to address. In this regard, the Government has launched an initiative in September 2014, to provide gainful employment for persons with disabilities. The initiatives highlighted above, will serve to alleviate the stigma still associated with persons with disabilities.

4. Migrants and victims of trafficking

Recommendation: 3, 10, 77, 78, 107, 114, 115, 119, 120

91. Migration is a key issue of concern, and a continuing challenge for the Government. One of the most notable steps taken was the ratification of the eight ILO core conventions, as well as the ratification of the *Anti-Trafficking Act* of 2013. The Government has also submitted to Parliament for accession, the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children.

92. Since 2011, the Government has been working in close collaboration with the International Organisation of Migration (IOM) to implement counter-trafficking projects in the Maldives, through also looking at the wider issue of migration management. It is also working with the Governments representing significant migrant populations in the country, to ensure better protection and services. In this regard, a Manpower Services Agreement was signed with Bangladesh in 2011, and a similar agreement is being discussed with India.

93. Prior to the ratification of the Act, the Government has addressed migration management and trafficking in persons through the Anti-Human Trafficking National Action Plan endorsed on 26 February 2013. As per the Plan, the Anti-Human Trafficking Unit was established on the same date. The Ministry of Economic Development is currently

the Government agency mandated with migration management. The Anti-Human Trafficking Unit under the Ministry, headed by a Minister of State, plays a leading role in coordinating with all relevant national agencies, as well as NGOs and the HRCM, and serves as the National Coordinating Centre. The Unit also handles all reported cases, and provides support to victims, placing them in shelters where necessary.

94. The *Anti-Trafficking Act* elevated the domestic legal framework to a higher level, as the law is modelled on international best practise model of prevention and rehabilitation of victims of trafficking. As required by the Act, a National Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Persons for 2015-2019 has been adopted. This five year National Action Plan reflects a comprehensive strategy that adopts a holistic approach by the Maldives in combating human trafficking. It seeks to address prevention, victim protection, criminal prosecution and international cooperation, and provides for separate shelters for male and female victims of trafficking.

95. The above measures, and the Government's openness to working with international stakeholders in addressing trafficking in persons in the Maldives, the Maldives was upgraded to a Tier 2 in the United States Trafficking in Persons Report 2014.

96. The Government is also in the process of formulating a National Migration Management Policy, which will identify issues, challenges and new eventualities in migration management in the Maldives.

97. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs also conducted an awareness raising media campaign on human trafficking, titled the "Blue Ribbon Campaign" in 2013. The programme, in collaboration with local media outlets, provided airtime and print space for discussion, debates, and opinions on human trafficking in the country. The IOM also undertook a survey to assess the awareness on human trafficking in the Malé region.

98. Challenges still remain. Provision of translation facilities is a continuing challenge. And in light of recommendations, the Government is reviewing accession to the ICRMW.

V. Structural issues and emerging challenges

A. High dispersion of population

99. The Maldives is presented with a geography that is extreme, even by the exceptional standards of small archipelagic states. The 1,190 tiny coral islands that comprise the Maldives, are spread across an area more than 90,000 square km of the Indian Ocean. The total population of the country is approximately 341,300 of which, close to 40 percent lives in the capital city Malé, which is one of the most densely populated cities in the world.

100. The islands in the Maldives are extremely small; out of the 188 inhabited islands, just 33 have a land area of more than one square km, and no fewer than 75 islands, which is more than a third of the total, have less than 500 inhabitants, while half of the islands have populations of less than 1,000 inhabitants.

101. The micro size of the islands, both in terms of land area and population, and the large distances between them, implies severe diseconomies of scale. These diseconomies of scale and the high cost of inter-island transport pose the biggest hindrance to development in the Maldives in every aspect. These are felt hardest when delivering health and education services (even at basic levels) and providing their infrastructure: nearly all materials need to be imported and on top of high costs of basic goods such as food items, construction costs are many times higher than in continental developing countries. These factors pose profound challenges in providing basic services guaranteed in the Constitution.

B. Religious issues

Recommendation: 91, 119

102. The Maldives rejects religious extremism and has strongly denounced and condemned terrorist activities carried out in the name of Islam.

103. Although the Maldives has a proud history of providing free education for all, with the rise of various radical religious ideas, the Government, at present, is faced with emerging challenges such as objections to sending girls to schools for formal education, as well as challenges to singing and dancing activities in schools. Although these have been identified as emerging issues and at present a relatively small number, the Government is addressing the issues through advising and the legislative framework by making it a punishable offense to keep a child from schooling.

104. Attitudes towards public life of women have also been changing due to religious approaches taken by some. Child marriages outside of courts, female genital mutilation and circumcisions, refusal to immunise babies, and rising acceptance of violence have been reported. Marriages outside of court—which are illegal—means women, once divorced, cannot seek child support, or register their children. Non-vaccination excludes children from formal schooling.

105. The Government has strongly condemned the practises of under-aged or forced marriage, non-vaccination of infants, and deprivation of school enrolment of girls and children. The Government acknowledges these challenges exist, and is working with relevant authorities, including religious leaders, to present the true virtues of the religion and of the society.

C. Drugs

Recommendation: 87, 120, 122

106. Illegal substances abuse has been a major problem in the Maldives for the past three decades. The problem is continuously evolving with the increase in number of substance abusers, and the prevailing addictive sub-culture of violence. A recent study done jointly by the Government and UNODC, estimated that the prevalence for Malé and atolls were 6.64% and 2.02% respectively. The study also found that an overwhelming majority (92%) of drug users were below 30 years.

107. The enactment of the *Drugs Act* in 2011, repealing the 1977 version, was a milestone in the Government's efforts to combat drug abuse and drug related offences. The Act prescribes offences and related sentences. Under the Act, a separate Drug Court was established which hears all offences under the Act. The Government's revised Act in 2011 to align the provisions to modern standards akin to international best practice, introduced for the first time the Drug Court mandated purely with rehabilitation and re-introduction of addicts into society.

108. Various collaborations are underway with UN bodies, in order to supplement the objectives of the above Act. In this regard, the National Drug Agency (NDA), established pursuant to the Act, is required to establish drug treatment and rehabilitation centres for drug dependent persons. The Government is also collaborating with rehabilitation centres in India and Sri Lanka, to allow for requests to seek rehabilitation overseas, as allowed by the Drug Act.

109. The Act also allows for rehabilitation centres to be established and run by private parties. The current process of rehabilitating drug dependent persons places a high demand

on the capacity of Government-run rehabilitation facilities, which is currently not met by the existing centres. The Regulatory Framework on licensing both Government and privately owned has been introduced in November 2014. Monitoring mechanisms have been established and minimum standards have also been developed. The government owned rehabilitation centres has now been licensed under the new regulation and has developed standard operating procedures to ensure smooth running of these centres.

110. The Government has received technical support to orient law enforcement personnel and NDA staff to the Act, and to chart the Agency's strategic development process in order to better fulfil their roles as stipulated in the Act.

D. Gang violence

Recommendation: 75

111. A Rapid Situation Assessment published in 2012 revealed that gang violence in the Maldives is becoming "increasingly commonplace and the nature of violence more brutal" as new types of drugs and weapons are used. There are reportedly between 20 and 30 different gangs operating in Malé alone, with 50 to 400 members in each group. The study also found that breakdown of family structure had compelled some young people to join gangs and seek the security and safety of family.

112. Gang violence has led to the infringement of the human rights violations of the larger population. The enactment of the *Gang Violence Act* in 2010 has led to the criminalisation of gang violence and organised crime, and sets out specific penalties for the creation, operation and the carrying out of criminal offences by a group or a gang of individuals.

E. Democracy consolidation

113. The Maldives enacted a new Constitution in 2008. The Constitution introduced a multi-party system of governance in the country, giving the right to every citizen to engage freely in political activities, which was further reinforced by the *Political Parties Act* of 2013.

114. The systemic changes established several new institutions of State with constitutionally guaranteed independence and considerable State power. The establishment of a number of such institutions also meant that the power of the executive branch is significantly diluted that is posing considerable challenges to maintaining political order in the society.

115. These challenges have been exacerbated by the realities of having to nurture and cultivate an entirely new system of governance under global spotlight. The level and depth of international scrutiny means that it has been an enormous challenge to ensure that the Maldivian State and its institutions are given the necessary space to make their own decisions, and emerge as an organic set of institutions tailored to provide local solutions to local challenges. Moreover, prolonged political tensions generated by political opposition, and continuous international scrutiny of the Government's attempts in reducing such tensions meant that the Government is required to spend more time in explaining its actions to international partners, instead of focusing on governance, and implementation of its political and international obligations, including those on human rights.

116. Most of the time, such external commentary and open scrutiny has led to disillusionment in some quarters of the population about the true spirit and gains of democracy, and for others to believe that the ultimate remedy for any local political

grievance is to be found at the international level, instead of through local institutions established by an ardours, yet democratic, process.

F. Climate change and environmental degradation

Recommendation: 124

117. Climate change poses an existential threat to the Maldives. The country is among the most vulnerable and least defensible countries to the projected impacts of climate change and associated impacts such as sea level rise and other extreme climatic events. The Maldives is one of lowest lying countries in the world. Over 80 percent of the total land area of the Maldives is less than 1 metre above sea level, 44 percent of the settlement footprints of all islands are within 100 metres of coastline and more than 97 percent of inhabited islands are affected by beach erosion. Negative effects of climate change such as sea level rise, could be devastating and threaten the very existence of the nation-State.

118. The Government's policy framework in protecting the environment and on combating climate change takes a rights-based approach that aims to properly manage the human dimensions of climate change. The Government believes that adaptation should support livelihoods and communities as they struggle to adapt to climate change. The policy framework views the natural environment as the key to socio-economic development. The Maldives Climate Change Policy Framework presents four strategic goals that provide a pathway for an integrated approach. The goals are (1) ensure and integrate sustainable financing in climate change adaptation opportunities and low emission development measures; (2) strengthen a low emission development future and ensure the energy security for the Maldives; (3) strengthen adaptation actions and opportunities and build climate resilient future to address current and future vulnerabilities; and (4) inculcate national, regional and international climate change advocacy and awareness in cross-sectoral areas.

G. Capacity constraints

119. One of the biggest challenges that the Maldives faces is the lack of trained and qualified professionals in almost all sectors. As other small countries, Maldives also experiences brain drain associated with lack of opportunities at home.

120. In realisation of the human rights enshrined in the Constitution, it is important to develop the right people with the right skills. The Maldives also faces challenges in meeting its international human rights obligations due to lack of capacity. This will be an on-going challenge for the Maldives.

VI. Conclusion

121. When the Maldives was initially reviewed in 2010, it had a handful of modern laws and a skeletal institutional structure required of a democratic society. Over the last four years, the Maldives has continued to "tick-off" its task list, in its journey of transition to a democratic society. The journey has faced some unprecedented stormy waters, as the democratic institutions of the State continue to face a range of issues, including initial teething challenges and being under international spotlight.

122. The Government of President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom is determined to maintain the momentum of democratic consolidation. The Government strongly believes that deepening the constitutional structures and processes are essential for democratic rule

to thrive in the country. The Government is determined to prevent any reversals and avoid breakdown of the democratic system. It is resolute in retaining the authenticity of our democratic journey by staying true to the Constitution and the laws.

123. As the country celebrates fifty years as an independent and sovereign country, it is proud of the progress that it has made economically, politically, and in realising a society that is compliant in adhering to the international norms, while retaining its unique character, its traditional values, and culture. Maldivians celebrate the country's politically exuberant and dynamic society. And it remains ready to work constructively with international partners in all efforts to further consolidate democracy through cultivating values and promoting human rights, in an environment of mutual respect, and through dialogue and partnerships.

Annex

Composition of the UPR Standing Committee

1. Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Chair)
2. Attorney General's Office (Co-Chair)
3. The President's Office
4. The Ministry of Home Affairs
5. The Ministry of Education
6. The Ministry of Health
7. The Ministry of Law and Gender
8. The Ministry of Environment and Energy
9. The Ministry of Youth and Sports
10. The Ministry of Housing and Infrastructure
11. The Ministry of Islamic Affairs
12. The Human Rights Commission of the Maldives
13. Maldives Democracy Network
14. Transparency Maldives